



Walk Toronto Comments on

IE19.11 YongeTOMorrow - Municipal Class Environmental Assessment on Yonge Street from Queen Street to College/Carlton Street

To: Members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee

From: Walk Toronto (Steering Committee)

Date: January 11, 2021

Walk Toronto is a grassroots, volunteer pedestrian advocacy group that works to improve walking conditions and pedestrian safety in Toronto.

Walk Toronto strongly supports the recommended design concept for the reconstruction of Yonge Street from Queen Street to College and Carlton Streets in the downtown core in the report (December 18, 2020) from the General Manager, Transportation Services.

Yonge Street is Toronto's signature main street, steeped in over 225 years of history, legend, and lore. It is the place where Torontonians congregate to celebrate sports victories, rally for political and social change, shop, dine, and enjoy performing art and cinema. Though Yonge Street has seen major changes over the past few decades – the opening of the iconic Eaton Centre, the creation of a new public square, revitalized theatre spaces, and the replacement of record stores with a new front door for Ryerson University – the street itself has not kept up with the needs of today's modern city.

As the report notes, Yonge Street attracts a high number of events, visitors, and tourists, resulting in an extremely high concentration of pedestrians, with the street struggling to meet the demand. With the addition of thousands of new residential units along the corridor, this demand will only continue to grow. The YongeTOMorrow plan represents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet the existing and future needs of downtown residents, workers, students, and tourists, and give it the iconic treatment the street – and Toronto – deserves.

While we at Walk Toronto are best known for advocating for safe and accessible places to walk in this great city, we also seek to improve the pedestrian experience. With four underused traffic lanes, there is little room on the sidewalks for public benches, cafes and patios, trees and planters, or public art. The recommended solution provides for more room to walk around, as well as the sort of things that makes walking a pleasurable activity.

Though the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the number of pedestrians on Yonge Street right now, the street, like others across the city, will spring back to life. Meanwhile, the pandemic has shown us more than ever the need for walkable streets, which becomes even more important in densely populated spaces such as this area. We also know that physical distancing has become a priority — something that the YongeTOMorrow option facilitates by making Yonge’s pedestrian clearway more consistent and eliminating sidewalk pinch-points. Installing and encouraging use of infrastructure for walking and cycling will become increasingly important to realize an affordable, environmentally responsible, and functional transportation network across our city.

Walk Toronto has been involved closely in the stakeholder process and we are very much aware of the difficult decisions and compromises made to get to the recommended proposal brought forward by Transportation staff to meet the needs of the many interests on Yonge Street. But there was a consensus that the status quo is unsustainable, and that Yonge Street needs to adapt to the 21st century city.

The YongeTOMorrow plan, presented here today, does just that.

This is an opportunity for the City of Toronto to create a safe, accessible, and exciting streetscape in the heart of the city that addresses the needs of today and of the future. Walk Toronto urges members of the Infrastructure and Environment Committee to rely on the evidence presented in the staff and to support the recommended option for a renewed and reinvigorated Yonge Street.

Sincerely,

Sean Marshall
Member of the Steering Committee, Walk Toronto